

ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

Newsletter April 2024 No 2



Australian Garden History Society
www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au

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BRANCH DIARY

20 APRIL
National Trust Open Day

26 MAY
*Joint AGHS/NT walk
Modernism & Canberra
Red Brick*

MAY 15
A Day at Retford Park

**Please note dates
details to follow**

JULY 5 (TBC)
Annual Film Day

25 JULY, 6PM
Lecture

22 AUGUST, 6PM
5.30 PM AGM
6 PM Annual Lecture

18 SEPTEMBER, 6PM
*Joint lecture with Friends of
NLA*

44TH AGHS ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
BUNBURY, WA
18 – 20 OCTOBER
2024
THEME: *HESPERIA:
LOOKING WEST*

Optional Day, 21 October

Bookings opened – go to
<https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/events-conferences/category/conference-information/>

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

CANBERRA & REGION HERITAGE FESTIVAL CANBERRA & REGION HERITAGE FESTIVAL

CANBERRA & REGION HERITAGE FESTIVAL 13 – 28 APRIL

As in previous years AGHS is participating in the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival in 2024. The programme is available online at <http://act.gov.au/heritagefestival>.

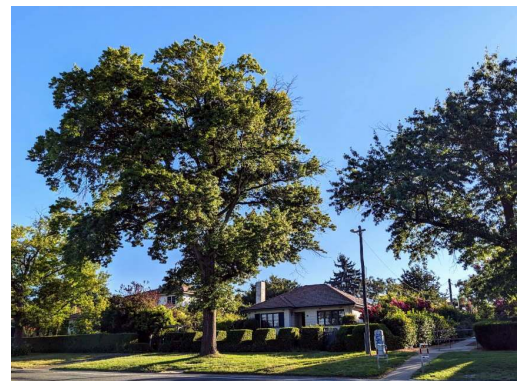
NATIONAL TRUST OPEN DAY 20 APRIL, 10AM – 3PM

A major event in the Festival is the National Trust Open Day. Come and rediscover the historic Yarralumla Woolshed with something for the whole family with performances, displays, food and more. Learn about its role in our pastoral history up until the last wool bale left from here in 1967. AGHS will have a stall which is a golden opportunity for us to let people know that AGHS exists and what we do. Call by our stall if you attend.

MODERNISM AND CANBERRA RED BRICK: UNDER THE TREES IN SUBURBAN GRIFFITH SUNDAY 28 APRIL, 2PM - 3.30PM **BOOKED OUT** **REPEAT: SUNDAY 26 MAY, 9.30 – 11.30 AM**

This heritage walk in Griffith was planned jointly by the AGHS and the National Trust ACT.

The walk around the leafy streets of suburban Griffith will showcase the heritage listed Evans Crescent Housing (built 1940) and offer a comparison with a Canberra red brick government cottage and early public two storey duplexes located near the Griffith Shops. All are settled into a delightful garden city setting with ample tree plantings and open-space public parks.



For bookings for the May date go to <https://www.trybooking.com/CQVHG>

CANBERRA & REGION HERITAGE FESTIVAL CANBERRA & REGION HERITAGE FESTIVAL

**BRANCH
COMMITTEE**

**A DAY AT RETFORD PARK
WEDNESDAY 15 MAY, 10.30 AM – 3 PM**

Robyn Oates, Chair
Sue Cassidy, Treasurer
Anne Claoue-Long, State
NMC Representative
Nancy Clarke, Secretary

Louise Gaudry
Rosanna Horn
Paul Mackay

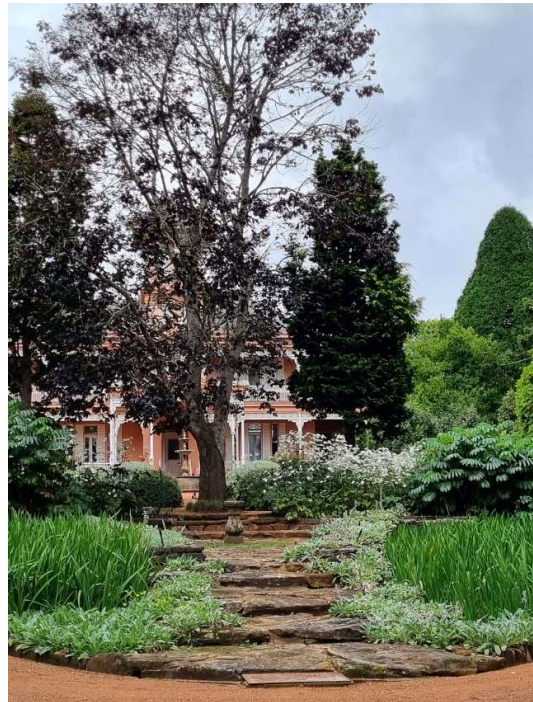
We are delighted to invite you to a day out at the historic Retford Park house and gardens in Bowral. Retford Park's European history extends back to 1821. In the 1880s the property was acquired by the Hordern family and in 1964 James Fairfax, philanthropist and newspaperman, transformed it from a farming property into a gentleman's country estate. It featured on the ABC Gardening Show on 5 April, now available on ABC iview.

It is now a National Trust property – the largest gift ever received by the Trust. The house has one of the best collections of 16th, 17th and 18th century English furniture in Australia as well as an amazing art collection.

The gardens will be spectacular in their autumnal hues – there are magnificent deciduous trees including mature oaks of various kinds, horse chestnuts, and a huge ginkgo. Other garden features include a bunya tree believed to be more than 130 years old. This is in a cretaceous garden along with conifers, ferns and cycads. There is also a large parkland, a knot garden, a camellia walk... it goes on. A true garden feast.

Retford Park is closed to the public on 15th May, but will kindly open up for us.

Transport	Self-drive
Directions	1325 Old Sth Rd, Bowral. Coming along the Old South Road from Canberra, the entrance will be on your right – there are white gates, and parking on site



Retford Park, photo Robyn Oates

Timing	We strongly suggest you arrive by 10.30. You need to allow 15 minutes from your car to the tour meeting point. Our tour of the house (approx 90 minutes) will start at 11 am. Our tour of the garden will be after lunch and will start at 1.30 (approx 1 hour). After this you may like to spend extra time in the wonderful gardens - the gates close at 4 pm.
Accessibility	There are some steps up to the main house and two flights of stairs, separated by a landing, to the first floor. There is no lift. There are no ramps or wheelchair accessible toilet facilities. Access to the house and gardens from the car park is pedestrian.
Lunch	Visitors are encouraged to bring a picnic lunch or to buy lunch at the Hearth Café, approximately 200 metres from Retford Park House. https://moonacres.com.au/hearth/
Bring	Walking shoes and clothing suitable for a chilly autumn day (and possibly your picnic lunch).

Cost	Members of the National Trust \$2.50 (you must include your number when you book) Others \$47.50
	This covers entry to the property and guided tours of the house and garden. We have made a private group booking, so will have the property to ourselves.
Bookings	Bookings are essential. Go to https://www.trybooking.com/CQRDY . Numbers are limited and bookings will close at 6 pm on Sunday 5 May. No refunds will be available after that time.
Inquiries	Robyn Oates, robyn.oates1@bigpond.com

SAVE THE DATE OUR ANNUAL FILM DAY AT GUNDAROO FRIDAY 5 JULY (DATE TBC)

The film for this year's screening is ***Saving Grace***, a 2000 British comedy film, directed by Nigel Cole and starring Brenda Blethyn and Craig Ferguson. Set in Cornwall, the film tells the story of a middle aged widow whose irresponsible husband left her in an enormous debt, forcing her to grow cannabis in her greenhouse along with her gardener Matthew to avoid losing her house.

As usual it is in the historic and warm Gundaroo Memorial Hall.

More details will be sent to members once the arrangements are finalised.

PAST EVENTS

CAPITAL HILL: ITS LANDSCAPING AND SOME OF ITS GARDENS WEDNESDAY 31 JANUARY

A large group of AGHS members and friends enjoyed our first event for 2024. Some were familiar with the gardens on the exterior of Parliament House and they were enriched by the detailed information gained on this walk; for many the gardens were a surprise.

Our terrific guide was Paul Janssens, Assistant Director, Landscape Services at Parliament House. Paul began at the Old Parliament House in 1986 and moved to the new House in 1988. He was here from 1988-2002 and he then went to the Australian National Botanic Gardens as the Curator, Living Collections. In 2008 he returned to Parliament House as the Head Gardener, later moving into his current position as Assistant Director, Landscape Services, at Parliament House. In addition to his horticultural knowledge, he is an expert in the history and significance of all the parliamentary gardens.

Paul and his colleague Paul James wrote the superb booklet "Parliament House-Landscape and Gardens Walk" which is for sale in the bookshop. Our AGHS Branch provided a souvenir copy for each attendee.

The precinct covers 33 hectares of which 13 hectares are garden beds, 10 hectares are turf and 10 hectares are buildings, roads and the Forecourt. The boundary for Parliamentary Services care is Capital Circle. A team of 23 people cares for all the gardens inside and outside the House. The area outside this is maintained by the National Capital Authority.

The shady eastern walk is planted with native flora which is mostly indigenous to the Canberra region. The natives include brittle gums (*Eucalyptus mannifera*) and scribbly gums (*Eucalyptus rossii*), she-oaks (*Allocasuarina cunninghamiana*) and grass trees (*Xanthorrea glauca*), bottlebrush and white correa and hardenbergia.

Exotic trees are another important part of the landscape. They are deciduous and let light into the buildings and paths during cold Canberra winters.

Near the front entrance to the native gardens are several scar trees. Paul House, a Ngambiri-Ngunawal custodian of the Canberra region took bark from one of these trees to make a coolamon which was used in the smoking ceremony on the Forecourt, during the ceremonial opening of the 47th Parliament in 2022.

Along the path there are narrow, sloped sections of lawn with the flag mast in centre vision at the top of the vista. Small bubbles of kidney lawn are situated along the pathway. These offer a spot to sit and rest. The overall design has a focus on practicality and public enjoyment.



Scar Tree, photo Nancy Clarke

The buffalo and couch grasses used in these eastern lawn areas were planted in 1988 when choices were more limited than they are today. It is also much more economical to reseed rather than introduce new species. Buffalo and couch grasses also need less water than the cool season grasses.

Paul explained that during the 2006 drought all watering stopped. 18,000 plants were lost as well as much of the lawn. Now watering is governed by computerised assessment which determines 80% of the daily evaporation and this then regulates the water used for irrigation. Watering does not occur every night. Each year a section is designated for maintenance and renewal. New plantings receive water for 12 months and then they are on their own.

All conduits for power and water to Parliament House are covered by lawn to ensure maintenance access is easy. Turf regrows quickly and no trees or shrubs need to be removed.

A large glasshouse is used to grow and care for indoor plants. These supply the whole of Parliament House interior and courtyards; they provide a reliable and economical supply of potted greenery.

There is a register of all trees in the gardens. Each tree is numbered and audited by a qualified arborist for safety and maintenance.

Acacia pycnantha, or golden wattle, is Australia's national floral emblem. Ironically it does not grow well in Canberra and the two lone specimens are struggling!

The House of Representatives Formal Gardens create a strong contrast to the native gardens. They are open to the public year-round and are often used for weddings and formal photos.

Here, two white lions, carved from Han marble, solemnly face each other. They were presented by the Chinese government in 1988. Yellow 'Zonta' roses were a gift from Zonta International in 1988 but unfortunately only one has survived the intervening years. Rows of flowering cherry trees (*Prunus serrulata/Jamasakura*) were given to the Parliament by the Government of Japan. The mass of blooms is magnificent in September. Nearby large garden beds of annuals border the water feature and, of course, rabbits eat the flowers.

There is a small Memorial Rose Garden, designed to honour all those members and senators who die while serving in office. Their names are inscribed on a plaque in the garden. Also, in the Eastern Formal Gardens there is a memorial to commemorate the victims of the MH17 tragedy and, nearby, a memorial to the victims of the Bali terrorist bombing.

Our stroll through the eastern gardens finished with refreshments close by in York Park, in State Circle. It was here that the Duke of York, who later became King George VI, planted an English oak in 1927 after the opening of the Australian Parliament. The tree still stands in what is now an oak plantation and we found welcome shade under it and its fellow oaks on that hot January evening. It was a relaxed and happy conclusion to a wonderful tour of wide and varied historical significance.

Robyn Oates

HORSE PARK AND ELM GROVE, GUNGAHLIN TUESDAY 5 MARCH

We are familiar with the large pastoral stations established on the Limestone Plains in the 19th Century, but there were other, less grand properties, some of which survive in various ways. AGHS member, horticulturist and columnist Jackie Warburton has the gardening contract for two of the oldest continually occupied and worked properties in the ACT - *Horse Park* and *Elm Grove* - and she organised a visit there by AGHS members and friends in March.

These two properties in what is now Gungahlin are closely linked. John and Mary Ann Gillespie arrived in Sydney from Ireland in 1841 under the bounty scheme. The family settled as tenants at "Dead Horse Gully" near the headwaters of Ginninderra Creek and in 1852 purchased the land that was later named *Horse Park*, which was extended by later land purchases. Some thirty years later their son James bought the almost adjacent *Elm Grove*.

Horse Park remained in the Gillespie family till 1895 when it was purchased by the Ryans of Michelago and held by them until it was resumed by the Commonwealth in 1916. It was then leased as an ongoing working farm. From 1985 Allan and Doris Pattison have had a close connection with the 350-hectare property, as tenants from 1985 and more recently as informal custodians. They currently lease land outside *Horse Park*, and are on site most days. It was a great pleasure to welcome Doris and Allan to the tour – they provided wonderful insights. Since 2011 *Horse Park* has been managed by the Suburban Land Agency, and the new suburb of Jacka is growing around it.



Horse Park, Photo Anne Claoue-Long

There are valuable surviving structures on site, particularly the 1850s stone cottage (now supported by concrete buttresses), a rare example of a simple though substantial building of its time. The land is very well watered with significant wetlands, a very likely

reason the site was selected, though these are currently under threat as the suburb develops. Jackie told us it is extraordinarily cold, so plantings that survive there have to be tough. Twenty significant trees have been identified on the wider site, though some of these have since been lost. Many of these are naturally occurring species, *Eucalyptus blakelyi*, *mannifera* or *melliodora* (Blakely's Red Gum, Brittle Gum, Yellow Box). Much of the current planting in the immediate garden area was done (and maintained) by Doris Pattison, and Jackie continues this.

Jackie is very conscious of the importance of maintaining the heritage values of *Horse Park* and its plantings. Her practice is as far as possible to replace plants with the same species (and cultivar if possible) and she has a very active propagation program – growing on cuttings for replacement or enhancement. She has developed a detailed digital 2D plan of plantings on site. There is a magnificent old pear tree (species not identified) that dominates the yard at the back of the cottage as well as some mature elms and deodar cedars.

Elm Grove is close by, surrounded by the encroaching suburban development. In the Gillespie family till 1985, the lease was then purchased by the Carmody family. Lee,



Yukari and their children live in the homestead, running it as a small wedding location. The property is dominated by large, old elm trees (*Ulmus procera*), two of which were planted to flank the entrance driveway and that possibly date from *Elm Grove's* establishment. Unfortunately, these trees are subject to attack by elm leaf beetle, but this is controlled by routine chemical injections and the trees are surviving. On the hot day we visited we did enjoy their welcome shade.

Majestic elm tree at Elm Grove, Photo Nancy Clarke

The Carmodys have done very significant landscaping on the site, but as well as the elms, there are also some early plantings. Two apple trees highly valued by the Gillespies are in the small front garden (they feature in historic photos), and an old sasanqua camellia (possibly *Camellia sasanqua* "*Onigoromo*") was in bloom for our visit. A recurring and rather sad note was that Jackie's numerous attempts to plant/replant roses in the front flower garden have been foiled by voracious and persistent rabbits.

It was a surprising and excellent outing. We thank Jackie, the Pattisons and Carmodys and the Suburban Land Agency for making it possible.

Nancy Clarke

EXPLORING GREEN GRIFFITH THURSDAY 4 APRIL

This walk explored Griffith through streets named Blaxland, Throsby, Evans, Stuart and Lefroy. Our expedition discovered the distinctive 'garden city' layout of crescents, circles, elliptical gardens, streets and some of the 20 parks and reserves in the suburb. Griffith was looking very green under the grey sky on the afternoon of April 4th but the rain held off, and our walk required far less effort than the explorers' ventures into rugged, arid and less hospitable parts of the country.

We were guided around a section of this large suburb by Anne Claoue-Long and Louise Gaudry. As an historian, Anne had researched the development of the suburb

and she began the walk by noting that the Aboriginal people who acted as guides to the explorers, and the Aboriginal pathways they followed, had yet to be recognised. As a long-standing resident, Louise shared her knowledge of the local history and accounts of effective activism of the Griffith Community Association. Her extensive plant knowledge comes from being a nursery woman for many years, and as we saw at the end of the walk, she is a remarkable rose grower.

As is often the case, walking showed us the details of houses and gardens that we can drive by without noticing. One easily missed feature are the laneways that run between the larger streets, designed for children walking to school in the days before the parental drop-off and pick-up.

The large deciduous trees that line many of the wide streets are another distinctive feature that Griffith shares with older Canberra suburbs. Autumn colours were just beginning to show in the pin oaks (*Quercus palustris*), elms (*Ulmus parvifolia*), maples (*Acer negundo*) and plane trees (*Platanus orientalis*). They contrast with the dark evergreens and varying shapes of cedars (*Cedrus atlantica*), pines (*Pinus cerasifera*) and cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens*).

The area we explored dated mostly from the 1940s and 1950s, with a mix of houses and matching gardens from different eras from then to recent redevelopments. The Commonwealth Government was the main supplier of houses in the pre-war years in this part of Griffith, and while many of the original Canberra red brick cottages with grey tiled roofs may have had extensions added, these 'guvvies' present harmonious street frontages.

One of the effects of post-war shortages of building supplies was the development of single and double storey duplexes and quadruplexes as shared walls were a way to reduce requirements for bricks and other materials. This form was built as both public and private housing and based on Radburn principles that set the fronts of homes facing each other over common yards and open green space, and backyards facing the street.

We saw well maintained examples of this early form of urban development, still surrounded by garden spaces planted with trees and shrubs rather than flower beds. Our group included a former resident who remembered the pluses and minuses of family life in a duplex. Ceiling insulation and double glazing have remedied winter cold and summer heat and the green surrounds remain, making these duplexes a very desirable form of medium density housing.

High and thick hedges are another remnant of past garden styles of large houses set well back from the street. Medium height hedges of camellias were flowering prolifically in white, palest pink and streaks of red and white, while low hedges of nandina added some autumn colour.

We made our way back to Louise's garden for drinks and nibbles. The elderflower cordial fitted perfectly into the atmosphere of the 1942 house and its brick-paved rose garden sheltered by large trees.

Anna Howe

BRANCH NEWS

WELCOME TO A NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER

We are delighted to welcome Dr Paul Mackey to our Branch Committee. Paul and his wife Gerrie joined AGHS two years ago and his willingness to become a committee member is much appreciated. In addition to being a keen gardener, Paul brings invaluable experience as a senior policy advisor in the public and private sectors.

A CALL FOR BOOK DONATIONS



The Branch is still seeking gardening/garden history themed books for its second sale later in April. The first one on 4 April was a big success.

- All gardening, horticultural, garden design and garden history books in good condition will be gratefully received.
- Proceeds will be spent on Branch projects such as our oral histories and digitisation.
- Books can be dropped off to the following committee members after notification of the delivery day and time to check someone will be there to receive them.

Southside:

c/o Louise Gaudry, 38 Stuart Street, Griffith, lgaudry@smartchat.net.au, 0413 729 953

Northside: c/o Anne Claoue-Long, 58 Glossop Crescent Campbell,
annecl@icloud.com, 0438 357 320

OF INTEREST

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS
www.anbg.gov.au

Friends Thursday Talks – held at 12.30 pm every Thursday from February to November. Bookings can be made 30 days in advance. For program details and for bookings go to <https://www.friendsanbg.org.au/calendar> This calendar also provides information on other talks, walks and activities in the Garden.

Visitors Centre Gallery Exhibitions, free, open daily 9.30am to 4.30pm.

6 April to 5 May – *Bush Fragrance*, The Friends Botanic Art Group 17th Annual Exhibition,

8 May - 2 June – *Garden of Letters*. An exhibition by the Canberra Calligraphy Society creating works that tell the story of the ANGB through calligraphy

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS BOTANIC GARDEN

Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 April: Autumn Festival

NATIONAL TRUST

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au>**Sunday 5 May, 9.30 – 11.30am**Heritage Walk: *City Hill – Often driven past, never walked in*

This walk winds around City Hill to take a close look at four phases in its development. The prominent site provides many links to the Indigenous past in the surrounding landscape, and made it an apex point of the Parliamentary Triangle in Griffin's 1913 plan for the National Capital. The present scene retains early plantings and some renewal planting, and a few commemorative features mark historic events. Early in 2024, the City Renewal Authority recognised that City Hill Park lacked appeal (except to rabbits) and it called for ideas for the future. We will look at some of the responses to imagine what the future might bring to enliven this heritage registered site.

Bookings at <https://www.trybooking.com/CQRVO>

NATIONAL ARBORETUM CANBERRA

www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au

For details on walks, workshops and other events visit the Arboretum website.

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF CANBERRA

<http://www.hsoc.org.au>

LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN GUARDIANS (LBGG)

<http://lakeburleygriffinguardians.org.au>